

Notes on \$2 bills, proof sets, tooled coins

By Roger Boye

A query about \$2 bills begins this week's question-answer forum.

Q—I'm told that \$2 Federal Reserve notes of series 1976 are flawed on the back side. What's the problem, and does the printing error increase the note's value? I own 38 such bills.

H.D., Rockford

A—The back-side design includes a rendition of John Trumbull's painting, "The Signing of the Declaration of Independence." Treasury engravers had removed six patriots in fitting Trumbull's masterpiece to the \$2 bill, an omission that was criticized by some historians.

Officials printed more than 500 million specimens with the truncated drawing, enough \$2 bills of series 1976 to satisfy collector demand for decades.

Q—I received my 1985 proof set from the government in mid-May, several weeks earlier than expected. But two scratches mar the half dollar. Can I get a refund?

T.E., Chicago

A—No, but mint staffers will exchange your set for another that should be damage-free. Write the Consumer Affairs Department of the United States Mint [633 3d St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20220], requesting a postage-free label to use in returning your proof coins to mint offices in San Francisco.

The government will send you a replacement set within four weeks of receiving your flawed merchandise, according to a Treasury spokesman.

Q—In hobby guidebooks I've seen the notation, "Beware of tooled coins." What does that mean?

W.B., Highland Park

A—Some swindlers attempt to improve the appearance of rare coins by sharpening design elements with engraving tools. Skilled hobbyists can detect such handiwork, but novices often are fooled into paying fancy prices for doctored keepsakes.

Q—I think I've hit the jackpot. While looking over my 1975 proof set, I discovered that the Lincoln cent, nickel and dime are dated 1975, but the other three coins read 1776-1976. Am I rich?

C.D., Evergreen Park

A—Sorry, but your proof set is quite normal. The mint made no quarters, half dollars or dollars dated 1975; instead, it began producing Bicentennial coins during that year, putting them in 1975 proof sets. Dealers in Chicago sell those sets for about \$8 each, just slightly above the government's issue price of \$7 a set.